

**Testimony of Karen A. Rupp**  
**Utah Congress of Parents and Teachers**

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**House Committee on Resources**  
**Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands**

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**Hearing on H.R. 4968**  
**Federal - Utah State Trust Lands Consolidation Act of 2002**  
**June 27, 2002**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Karen Rupp. I am here today representing the Utah Congress of Parents and Teachers - the Utah PTA.

Attached you will find a letter of support for the 2002 Federal – Utah State Trust Lands Consolidation from Susan Dayton, President of Utah PTA. Utah PTA strongly supports the Federal - Utah State Trust Lands Consolidation Act of 2002 H.R. 4968. We urge Congress to enact this legislation promptly and without amendment.

Education is important to Utahns. Taxpayers in Utah spend more of their tax dollar on education than any other state. Two-thirds of Utah is federal land, which pays no taxes. Utah has a young population with the highest number of school students per taxpayer. The untaxed federal land combined with the high student-taxpayer ratio results in the state with the highest tax commitment to education providing the lowest per pupil funding of all fifty-one states. Consequently, school trust lands are significant because the endowment fund created by these lands generates an increasing revenue stream of interest and dividends to each Utah school.

Congress granted school trust lands to Utah at statehood for the express purpose of providing funding for Utah's public schools. Utah has not always been exemplary in managing the lands and revenues as a trust. It was the PTA in the late 1980's that recognized how school trust lands could become an important revenue source for education in Utah, if they were managed as a trust as was intended at statehood. Utah PTA passed a resolution, you will find attached with the written testimony that began the movement to reform the way school lands in Utah were managed. At that time there was just \$34 million in the permanent State School Fund where revenues from the land are deposited. Utah PTA, with the other education groups in the state, became unified in their resolve to ensure that school trust lands be managed for schools. After significant study, the legislature created the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration, an independent state agency, to manage the school trust lands in 1994. Now just eight years later, the fund has grown to \$351 million.

Legislation such as H.R. 4968 will have a direct impact on Utah students. In 1999, the legislature established the School LAND Trust Program that distributes the annual interest and dividends from the permanent State School Fund directly to each public school on a per pupil basis. Committees consisting of the principal, teachers and parents determine the school's greatest academic need. They prepare a plan to

address the identified need with their portion of the annual trust land dividend. Local school boards approve the plans and exercise oversight of plan implementation and spending. It is a model program for local control and site-based decision making that works. As a result, this exchange will make a difference for every child in Utah.

Schools implement plans that are unique to the needs of students at each school. The following are examples of how two different schools used their trust land funds to make a difference:

Whitehorse High School is located on the Navajo Tribal Lands and is 99% Navajo. Parents, students, and faculty determined that the Heritage Language Program is a pivotal component of the Whitehorse High School curriculum; therefore, they developed a Cultural Center on site at Whitehorse High School. The purpose of the Cultural Center is to provide resources to teach about the Navajo culture and traditions. It provides informational resources such as books, tapes, and educational curricula. The center utilizes real life cultural experiences. Hands-on authentic instruction, integrated into the mainstream curriculum, provides students with meaningful relevant content. The center tests for English proficiency, enabling the school to determine if instruction is having a positive impact on learning. Parents are notified of the test's results. Parents who serve on the School Improvement Team actively analyze the data with teachers, and administrators. In addition, a summer school to remediate weak academic areas is provided for a month. The teachers integrate writing, math, science, social studies, reading and traditional Navajo arts and crafts. This plan will be ongoing to provide educational opportunities for the students at Whitehorse High School.

The second school is Bacchus Elementary located in Kearns, Utah. This school has 15 different primary languages spoken as well as a mobility rate of 39.5%, which has increased 4% over the last few years. The committee used the school's dividends to hire an aide to help students with limited English proficiency and reading difficulty. Their testing showed improvement in scores, especially among those who are considered English Language Learners (ELL).

As parents, teachers, principals, and school boards become involved in deciding how to make the greatest difference for their students with the school trust land dividends, they also become aware how important it is that trust lands be managed to produce revenue. School children should not go without basic education needs such as textbooks, technology and professional development while the public enjoys scenic wonders, restores the habitat of endangered species, hunts and recreates at the children's expense. Different interest groups of the state of Utah are beginning to understand that there can be solutions to competing land management practices. One solution that Utah and the United States Congress have found that works is land exchanges. Utah PTA supports fair compensation to the schools of Utah when the federal government captures the children's land for preservation or public uses. We thank Governor Leavitt, former Secretary Babbitt, Congressman Hansen and Cannon, Senators Bennett and Hatch as well as all who sit on this committee and their staffs who made the Utah Schools and Land Exchange of 1998 and the Utah West Desert Land Exchange of 2000 successful. These two prior exchanges have resulted in the protection of over a half million acres for national parks, monuments, Native American reservations, national forests and wilderness. The exchanges will increase revenues to the permanent trust fund that in turn will increase the annual dividend to schools this year and for decades to come.

HR 4968 Federal-Utah State Trust Lands Consolidation Act of 2002 solves the conflict in land management for over 100,000 acres of school trust lands in the state of Utah. It will directly benefit the schoolchildren of Utah. It will directly benefit the American public by preserving the beautiful San Rafael Swell and the

species that live within the Red Cliffs Conservation Area. We strongly encourage your support of the legislation.

Thank you for inviting me to testify here today.

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